

The Promise of American Higher Education 4-14-2025

Dear Members of the Harvard Community,

For three-quarters of a century, the federal government has awarded grants and contracts to Harvard and other universities to help pay for work that, along with investments by the universities themselves, has led to groundbreaking innovations across a wide range of medical, engineering, and scientific fields. These innovations have made countless people in our country and throughout the world healthier and safer. In recent weeks, the federal government has threatened its partnerships with several universities, including Harvard, over accusations of antisemitism on our campuses. These partnerships are among the most productive and beneficial in American history. New frontiers beckon us with the prospect of life-changing advances—from treatments for diseases such as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, and diabetes, to breakthroughs in artificial intelligence, quantum science and engineering, and numerous other areas of possibility. For the government to retreat from these partnerships now risks not only the health and well-being of millions of individuals but also the economic security and vitality of our nation.

Late Friday night, the administration issued an updated and expanded list of demands, warning that Harvard must comply if we intend to “maintain [our] financial relationship with the federal government.” It makes clear that the intention is not to work with us to address antisemitism in a cooperative and constructive manner. Although some of the demands outlined by the government are aimed at combating antisemitism, the majority represent direct governmental regulation of the “intellectual conditions” at Harvard.

I encourage you to read the letter to gain a fuller understanding of the unprecedented demands being made by the federal government to control the Harvard community. They include requirements to “audit” the viewpoints of our student body, faculty, staff, and to “reduc[e] the power” of certain students, faculty, and administrators targeted because of their ideological views. We have informed the administration through our legal counsel that we will not accept their proposed agreement. The University will not surrender its independence or relinquish its constitutional rights.

The administration’s prescription goes beyond the power of the federal government. It violates Harvard’s First Amendment rights and exceeds the statutory limits of the government’s authority under Title VI. And it threatens our values as a private institution devoted to the pursuit, production, and dissemination of knowledge. No government—regardless of which party is in power—should dictate what private universities can teach, whom they can admit and hire, and which areas of study and inquiry they can pursue.

Our motto—Veritas, or truth—guides us as we navigate the challenging path ahead. Seeking truth is a journey without end. It requires us to be open to new information and different perspectives, to subject our beliefs to ongoing scrutiny, and to be ready to change our minds. It compels us to take up the difficult work of acknowledging our flaws so that we

might realize the full promise of the University, especially when that promise is threatened.

We have made it abundantly clear that we do not take lightly our moral duty to fight antisemitism. Over the past fifteen months, we have taken many steps to address antisemitism on our campus. We plan to do much more. As we defend Harvard, we will continue to:

- nurture a thriving culture of open inquiry on our campus; develop the tools, skills, and practices needed to engage constructively with one another; and broaden the intellectual and viewpoint diversity within our community;
- affirm the rights and responsibilities we share; respect free speech and dissent while also ensuring that protest occurs in a time, place, and manner that does not interfere with teaching, learning, and research; and enhance the consistency and fairness of disciplinary processes; and
- work together to find ways, consistent with law, to foster and support a vibrant community that exemplifies, respects, and embraces difference. As we do, we will also continue to comply with *Students For Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, which ruled that Title VI of the Civil Rights Act makes it unlawful for universities to make decisions “on the basis of race.”

These ends will not be achieved by assertions of power, unmoored from the law, to control teaching and learning at Harvard and to dictate how we operate. The work of addressing our shortcomings, fulfilling our commitments, and embodying our values is ours to define and undertake as a community. Freedom of thought and inquiry, along with the government’s longstanding commitment to respect and protect it, has enabled universities to contribute in vital ways to a free society and to healthier, more prosperous lives for people everywhere. All of us share a stake in safeguarding that freedom. We proceed now, as always, with the conviction that the fearless and unfettered pursuit of truth liberates humanity—and with faith in the enduring promise that America’s colleges and universities hold for our country and our world.

Sincerely,

Alan M. Garber